

## EVANGELISATION OF GHANA: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ROLES OF WOMEN<sup>1</sup>

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Evangelisation is the process of bringing the Good news into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new (Lineamenta 1990:1). Although evangelisation aims at an interior change, its manifestation must be holistic; it should reflect in the lifestyle and conduct of the converts that is in their relationships and interactions with other human beings and in their handling of other parts of creation.

Evangelisation is effected when devotees of the teachings of Christ to others who are ignorant of this message proclaim the word of God and the latter in turn spread the salvific message (Lineamenta 1990: 15). This is the traditional approach to evangelism, which is handed down from one individual, or persons to the other. As such evangelisation is a cultural system transmitted from the knowledgeable, initiated generation to the uninformed and uninitiated in the gospel of Christ. The gospel then becomes an acquisition, a heritage that must be shared. The processes of evangelisation therefore should be relative and contextual in the sense that it must take into consideration the socio-cultural, psychological, and ecological factors of the would-be converts.

Again evangelisation must be a reciprocal, participatory endeavour taking cognisance of the views of the would-be converts who, as a fundamental requirement must be taught to understand Christ - who he is, what he stands for, and the merits and/or perils that Christianity entails. Similarly, the evangelisers or evangelists must also understand the cultural background of the targeted converts, a culture that has conditioned their beliefs and practices, reasoning, personality etc., and the dynamism of the times in which they live without necessarily compromising its essential character. Evans-Pritchard (1951:110) argues in a similar vein that:

If a missionary wishes to convert a people to Christianity, some knowledge of his or her own religious beliefs and practices is required. Otherwise

apostolic teaching is impossible, because it has to be through the religious concepts of the natives.

The charge to evangelise has a Christological foundation in the words:

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you.  
(Matthew 28: 19-20)<sup>2</sup>

This message, taken in its Biblical context, was assigned explicitly to the eleven male apostles before the physical departure of Christ from this earth. Yet considering events preceding this charge we observe that it was a woman, Mary Magdalene,<sup>3</sup> who was the first person to have been charged with the evangelisation message at the graveside on the day of the resurrection. She was sent by Christ as an individual to spread the good news of the resurrection to the apostles. This good news of the resurrection itself was to be the basis upon which the apostles were to minimize their doubt about the nature of the master, Jesus Christ; they had been serving, so as to increase their belief in him.<sup>4</sup> Implicitly, she was the first person to evangelise to the apostles who in turn spread the news. Nevertheless, like many issues, women's involvement in spreading the gospel has hardly been given due recognition until recently when women writers and feminist activists on Christian religion, including Westerners such as Mary Daly, Rosemary Ruether, Judith Kraemer, Elisabeth Schlusser-Fiorenza and Africans such as Filomena Steady, Achola Paula, Mercy Oduyoye and others began reinterpreting the Bible from female perspectives. Reflecting on the great commission, what is important in contemporary times is not to which gender the message was given but how the charge is to be inclusively transmitted without negotiating the content, namely, to convey the teachings of Christ which is love to all human beings. As will be more evident in this paper, evangelisation takes various forms and both men and women who are involved are all working towards a positive change in the quality of human life as well as equality and human rights. These are all issues Christ was concerned with.

This paper seeks to elicit the role of women in the evangelisation processes in Ghana from its beginnings to contemporary times. It will also discuss

the contribution of women in Spiritual Churches in this endeavour. Spiritual Churches are African religious innovations that accord women empowerment to found, lead and manage their own churches. This female assertiveness in African religious movements has brought a marked re-awakening in the practice of Christianity, for example, in the redefinition of leadership in mission churches generally, and the question of female priesthood particularly. The study is based on library and archival material as well as data from my field research on Spiritual Churches, and a random sampling of women and men members of three Protestant Churches in Accra. These data are supplemented with my own knowledge and first hand experience as a Roman Catholic.

### **Evangelisation in Ghana: Early beginnings**

The history of the evangelisation of Ghana begins with the history of Christianisation of Ghana. This is said to have begun with the Portuguese European explorations in the 15th century. Among these explorers were Catholic priests commissioned by a Papal Bull to create "Holy faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and lead in this faith all souls desirous of being saved" (Odamtten 1978:12). The Portuguese landed in Shama in 1471 where they symbolised their presence by planting a cross on its shores before they moved to Edina (Elmina). There they were enchanted by immense deposits of gold wealth. This glittering attraction diminished the urge to evangelise, since the clerics themselves became entangled in trade rather than evangelisation. In 1482 the Portuguese erected a castle in Elmina to fortify their interest in the lucrative gold trade, which was later to expand to include slaves and other items (Debrunner 1967; Sanneh 1983).

As a result, conversion of the Africans remained virtually negligible until the arrival of Portuguese Augustinian and French Capuchin monks in Elmina during the later part of the 16th century. However, the Dutch conquest of the Elmina castle in 1637 saw the intensification of the slave trade. This greatly frustrated the renewed attempt at Christianity, its survival precisely Roman Catholicism (Sanneh 1983).

Protestant attempts to revive the evangelisation process, through intensive education, began with the Dutch Moravians in 1742, followed by The

Church of England's Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in 1751. By 1828, the Basel Mission (now Presbyterian Church of Ghana) had consolidated its missionary activities among the Akuapem, gradually extending to other peoples of the Eastern region. The Wesleyan Methodist settled in the coastal region in 1834. Meanwhile the Bremen Mission (Evangelical Presbyterian Church)<sup>3</sup> entered the Volta region from Togoland in 1847, and finally the Roman Catholics staged a successful come-back to the coast in 1880, and entered the north of Ghana, which had already been islamized in 1906 (Sarpong 1974; Boahen 1975).

### **Women's Contribution in the Evangelisation Processes.**

It has been asserted that a major characteristic of the evangelisation processes of the 18th and 19th centuries, and a significant factor that gave the Protestants a break-through in spreading the gospel, helping them to yield better results than their Catholic predecessors, was the inclusion of missionaries of African descent (Sanneh 1983; Asana 1988). Just as the evangelising personnel recognized the indispensability of African men as agents to facilitate the spreading of the gospel, the female christianisation effort was not an exclusively foreign enterprise. Women of African descent and later Africans themselves were engaged in the enterprise. The Basel Mission, especially, saw the need to reshape their view of Africans and their culture and to present the gospel, "in a way which will minimize Western cultural interference" (Sanneh 1983:113). This new methodological approach not only resulted in an evangelisation mark scoring, but it underlines the earlier contention that the process should be culturally relative, mutual, and participatory to ensure lasting effects.

European clerical wives, nuns and laypersons, including women of African descent in the 18th and 19th centuries and later almost exclusively Ghanaian women began the evangelisation processes in Ghana. Documentation on the role of women in evangelisation has not been very impressive even though women's roles have been very remarkable, developing steadily and progressively from its onset to date. Education was the main vehicle and a pre-requisite for understanding the gospel message, but clad in European culture the new system of formal education was reasonably

suspect to Ghanaians, and they were thus initially reluctant to have their children educated. When the idea of foreign education was finally sown, parents were especially unwilling to have their girls included. This was due to the polarisation of the functions of females in the two religious cultures. The women missionaries were enjoined "to devote their lives to bringing God to the women of Africa." Girls were to be trained as good servants and housewives, *but above all for the Lord* (Debrunner 1967:149-150; Pfann 1965: 23. Emphasis mine). The idea of women serving the Lord as nuns or brides of Christ, with its resultant injunction of celibacy, particularly among Roman and Anglo Catholics was perhaps the greatest obstacle for Africans to convert to Christianity and subsequently attain education. In African societies generally, females were and remain the bedrock of society. They are also the foundation and main vehicle for the perpetuation of human life; hence the high premium placed on their fertility. This is inherent in the saying; "Obi nnton n'akoko ber kwa" (Fante-Akan) This may be translated as, One does not voluntarily dispose of the hen that lays the golden egg, or as Sofola in his *Wedlock of the Gods* (1972: 28) writes, "a man's daughter is his source of wealth." Thus evangelisation demanded a lot of hard work and more persuasion on the part of the few missionaries available to reach out to girls. It was in this context that women evangelists became more relevant. Women missionaries or evangelists were therefore specifically engaged to handle the conversion of girls through teaching and other charitable works. This explains the setting up of girls elementary and secondary schools under the supervision and management of female missionaries.

Protestant women, notably wives of missionaries were the first to attempt the conversion of females through education in addition to their wifely support services, which strengthened and encouraged the ministrations of their pastor-husbands. They concentrated on teaching girls and women in the basic European education of reading, writing, and arithmetic, in European forms of housewifery and cooking, needlework etc. Meanwhile their pastor-husbands handled the direct proclamation of the gospel to the wider community. The Presbyterian Church of Ghana acknowledges the efforts of women:

The establishment of women's work in the Presbyterian Church dates as far back as a hundred years or more. When the Basel Mission began to establish various congregations and institutions in Ghana, the wives worked assiduously and in close cooperation with them by giving basic domestic and religious training to women in the areas.... concerned. (Gyimah 1987:3)

The pioneer missionary wife in this endeavour was Anna Riis, the wife of Rev. Andreas Riis. In fact Anna Riis could be described, not as an auxiliary to her husband, but as a missionary in her own capacity. She willingly accompanied her husband to the West Indies, a long and risky sea journey at that time, to recruit people to help with the propagation of the gospel in Ghana. Presumably, she must have been influential in the selection of the West Indian families to be recruited because - unlike Catholic female missionaries or nuns, who were organized groups bound by the vows of obedience, chastity and poverty among others, - these protestant women or missionary wives were ordinary people. As such they were more 'humanly' liable to render opposition under certain situations than would nuns. Therefore it was necessary that Anna Riis select people (women) she thought would be agreeable to work with, a necessary condition for collaboration and harmony in the task ahead.

According to Oku-Ampofo (1981:45-50), these West Indian women worked in Ghana under her patronage and later continued the work, which Anna Riis had single-handedly begun. Prominent among them was Anna Miller, daughter of Rev. Joseph Miller, who assisted the wife of Rev. Widman at the vocational school for girls established by the Basel Mission in 1847 in Akropong. Through hard work and dedication Anna Miller became one of the female pioneers in evangelisation (Oku-Ampofo 1981: 45-50).

In the history of the Wesleyan Methodist, Harriet Wrigley, wife of Rev. George Wrigley became very influential in laying the foundations of Wesley Girls High School in Cape Coast, which was efficiently managed after her death by Elisabeth Waldron, an issue of a European and Ghanaian parentage (Bartels 1965: 16-21).

Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles (O.L.A) were the first Roman Catholic nuns to take up the greater challenge of female missionary activities in

1883 (Pfann 1965: 23). Having devoted their lives wholly to the services of their Lord Jesus Christ, the nuns had ample time and energy to contribute immensely to the education of girls beginning at Elmina and Cape Coast. According to Pfann (1965) religious sisters of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus established the first Catholic women teacher training college (later to become a secondary school for girls) in 1946 in Cape Coast.

These nuns, missionary wives and children imparted Christian beliefs, practices and values to their students. The missionaries were convinced that the educated mother would base the training of her children on the Christian principles she herself had learned (Odamten 1978: 112). This assertion is valid because as the sole nurturers and trainers of their children mothers are likely to impart any knowledge they have acquired in their education to their offspring. Also, since prolific progeny is the most treasured significance of women in African societies, the children of female Christians would definitely mean an increase in the Christian population. It is within this female fecundity that the classic gender analogy by the famous Ghanaian educator, Dr. Emmanuel Kwegyir Aggrey, becomes relevant. Aggrey asserted that educating a man profits only that individual, while educating a woman means imparting knowledge to the wider population - corollary, the conversion of one woman invariably results in the making of a multitude of Christians. Here one could argue that by extending education to girls a kind of gender balance was advocated for in the Christianisation process, though it was based on European cultural ideals, which kept women in the domestic sphere. The social significance of the emphasis on training girls in what was known as "typical female work" indirectly resulted in the type of gender socialization that exists in Ghana today.

Gradually, the missionaries gave way to Ghanaian Christians to continue the work. For this purpose the Mary Immaculate Congregation, the first society of African nuns of the Catholic church in Ghana was founded in Northern Ghana in 1946 with five Ghanaian girls from Navrongo (Pfann 1965:63). Other Ghanaian religious congregations were to follow in the South. This event is the greatest contribution by Ghanaian women to Christianity, because as nuns they had to compensate their socio-religious

obligation of motherhood for the love of Jesus Christ and the evangelising mission. The value of an African woman as stated earlier is expressed in motherhood. Not only the unmarried state but the childless woman is without esteem within the society. Thus to forgo the most valued societal honour in order to work solely for Christ is the greatest sacrifice and love Ghanaian women have shown for the promotion of the gospel. We have thus in Ghana, evangelisation from within, and this began five decades ago (1946) even before the exhortation by Pope Paul VI that, "Africans are missionaries to [them] selves; you Africans must continue upon the continent, the building up of the church" (Lineamenta 1990: 19-20).

Ghanaian women, specifically Protestants, have resolutely taken up the challenge by the Pope and have achieved success through their ordination into the ministry. This event has certainly advanced the image of women's emancipation in the church. It has minimized the inferiority views that have been associated with the female and now women can be said to be experiencing "[their] share of the blessing," to use the words of Judith Kreamer.

### **Endemic Evangelisation by Women in Spiritual Churches**

Spiritual churches represent religious formulations that seek to interpret Christian life and the gospel within the context of Ghanaian culture. Some of their functions are to heal, prophesy, and solve diverse human needs including socio-economic and psychological problems through the use of religion. Their emergence in Ghana was preempted by the visit of the Liberian wandering prophet, William Wade Harris to Ghana in 1914. Madam Grace Tani a former traditional priestess at the Tano shrine in Nzema founded the first ever-spiritual church in Ghana, which synthesizes aspects of Christianity and Ghanaian culture. Mobilising her immense knowledge in traditional African religion and fusing it with Christian religion she formed a new religion, spiritual church, as a form of protest against mission Christianity's attempt to separate religion and medicine. In her endeavour to contextualize Christianity Madam Tani relied on her knowledge of her former religion, and focused on the problems of her own sex to make a meaningful and beneficial impact on society. (Sackey



1989:24). African religion generally is intricately connected with healing which is also the main feature of spiritual church activity. Many Christians from mission churches drift into spiritual churches for the purposes of healing and other needs that are not efficiently addressed by their mission churches.

Apart from healing, spiritual churches mainly use local languages rather than English as the medium of worship and Bible teaching. This tends to give a better understanding and meaning to otherwise intricate doctrines, and thus makes indigenisation and the Christian Gospel more purposeful and accessible to as many people as possible.

Women are founders and leaders of their churches and other females with spiritual endowment can climb the religious hierarchy to attain the highest position of prophetess or bishop in spiritual churches, a position that is still inconceivable in mission churches. Indeed this advantage for women in spiritual churches encouraged protestant women in their successful struggle for admission into the priesthood as will be evident later.

Though predominately in the urban areas spiritual churches have penetrated the remotest villages in Ghana where they have established branches, and where they have not hesitated to place women in responsible positions.<sup>6</sup> Here one is inclined to affirm the hypothesis that women move into leadership positions only in the absence of men. Though this might be true to some extent, since the men have drifted into the urban centres for various kinds of wage/salaried employment and activities, it is equally true that women are given such roles because of their capabilities which have been demonstrated in the formation of the spiritual church phenomenon generally, and their involvement of development projects for their communities. The Saviour's Church of Madam Essawah (Sekondi), Rev. Grace Affanyi's Grace Divine Healing Ministry (Ekumfi Adanse), Bishop Sarah Walker's Calvary Reformed Church (Abura Dunkwa), and Auntie Grace Mensah's Spiritual Revival and Healing Centre (Abura Edumfa) are only a few examples of female contribution to evangelisation (see Sackey 1979 and 1996). Through their religious ministrations, healing and deliverance services, the provision of schools

for children and sometimes adult education, and the involvement of the needy in self-help projects (e.g. farming, food marketing), the word of God has spread to the rural areas, the seat of traditional religion. The Church of Pentecost, for example, owed its growth to a woman called Christina Obo. Leonard (1989:42-45) writes that the church really began when Christina Obo, a wealthy woman came to one of Pastor Mckeown's meetings in Saltpond in 1938. Leonard observed that wealthy women in the Gold Coast (Ghana) wore their gold earrings and other ornaments with pride, but Mrs. Obo gave all her jewelry to James Mckeown, who sold them to finance the penniless church. Obo also organized the women at Saltpond for Bible study and later taught women all over Ghana how to pray and evangelize. Thus through the woman the church made many converts (Leonard 1989:42-45). Mckeown, apparently impressed with Obo and Ghanaian women, is quoted as saying: "I don't know what the women in St. Paul's day were doing wrong." Yet he did nothing to compensate the women. Apparently, his European patriarchal background made him conform to the Pauline injunctions, and even after more than half a decade of the existence of the Church of Pentecost the highest position of women is at the deacon level which is the lowest rank for men in that church (see Sackey 1996).

The successes of spiritual churches have given mission churches a new awakening and stimulated them also to indigenise Christianity through the use of African music, drumming and the use of indigenous languages and symbols. Modified forms of African healing and deliverance practices have also entered mission Christianity via the spiritual churches. Most important, the existence of female priesthood in both African indigenous religions and spiritual churches provided a basis for Protestant women to fight for the right to evangelise as members of the clergy in the mission churches.

In fact, Ghanaian women, particularly those in the protestant churches conceded more than half a century ago that the main methods of evangelisation - through teaching, nursing and domestic work - were not the ultimate height of religious expression. They were indirect forms of participation but they wanted direct involvement in the salvific project.

With this objective women began to strive persistently for active and direct involvement in the transmission of the word of God that they had already been practising at home to their families; in short, they wanted to be ministers of the Gospel also in the church.

This aspiration was in accordance with African culture where women have significant religious roles vested in them. Among the Asante, for example, the *ohenma* or queen mother is the highest ritual functionary. Although one would argue that she is the only woman allowed entry into the sacred stool room, she nevertheless performs the most preeminent religio-political duty there, which is the nomination and installation of the Asantehene. Also, assuming the sacred regency in the demise of the Asantehene, the *ohenma* also becomes the *de facto* occupant of the ancestral stool, however temporal. She is also the only person who can reprimand the sacral Asantehene in public, a function otherwise tabooed to any other human being, even men. Women in most Ghanaian societies function as priestesses, revealing divine messages to humankind on the one hand, and conveying human supplication to divinity on the other hand - no mean religious role. Perhaps, Ghanaian women thought they could transfer this prerogative into Christian religion but this was impossible since the cultural matrix from which Christianity reached Ghana was absolutely patriarchal. It therefore sought to subvert the high religious duties entrusted to women with Biblical injunctions such as 1 Cor.14: 34-36 and Timothy 2: 11-12. In this regard the record of Christianity as seen in the development of female clerical leadership is a poor one. Women have been the scapegoats of Christian ascetism and have been viewed as the contaminative force of sin especially for the male clergy" (Steady 1978:15). They have been declared unfit for clerical and thus for any leadership role in the realm of religion. Some of the supposed inferiority of women is inherent in the Biblical creation myth in Genesis (1:18) where the woman was created as an afterthought for the lonely man. Again the Genesis (2:12) story that sees the woman as the source of discord between divinity and human beings, together with the concept of ritual uncleanness in Leviticus (chapter 12), have formed the basis of inferiority theory of women in Christianity. Although similar ideas about female impurity and evil exist among Africans, these do not entirely debar women in traditional societies from performing religious functions, as indicated above.

These obstacles notwithstanding, the struggle to become pastors progressed steadfastly and their objective was achieved in 1979 when the first ever woman pastor, Gladys Nyarko, was ordained in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana.<sup>7</sup> This opened up the way for further female ordination in 1984 of Dr. Juliana Awuku and Grace Nnuru into the Methodist Church of Ghana's ministry (Gyimah-1987: 4-8). The Methodist Church of Ghana has even gone further to induct lay women, who compete against men, to hold the second highest position in the church, that of vice-president. So far two women have held this position, Mrs Sophia Moore (1990-1992) and Mrs. Georgina Baiden (1994-1996), the immediate past vice-president. Other protestant churches including the Evangelical Presbyterian churches can now boast of female pastors. However, this religious attainment has not been an exclusive innovation or creation by Protestant women. As already indicated the concept of priesthood exists in traditional society and it was embellished and emphasized in the early 1900s also by spiritual churches, the first of which was founded by a woman. The basis of Christian women priesthood, thus, is firmly rooted in the Ghanaian culture and its recognition and implementation in mission churches is only one mode of contextualizing the faith. Contextualization or indigenisation is defined as the new ordering or "labeling which frequently does not uncover an unknown something, but rather reveals a depth or richness to be found in the known and commonplace that one experiences in a fresh and creative way." (Williams 1988:129). In other words contextualization builds on what already exists in a new framework. It identifies aspects of culture that are significant and still meaningful to a particular group of people in time and space.

The idea of women priests in the Protestant churches has sent resounding notes to the Catholic church, where even though the question of female priesthood is still remote, there has nonetheless been a redefinition of female roles. The status of women in the Catholic Church has improved considerably to the extent that nuns are permitted, in post-Vatican II era, to assist in the distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful. Other stringent, restrictive rules concerning the lives of nuns have been relaxed so that they can interact freely with the faithful in order to evangelise

effectively. Again girls between the ages of 8 and 15 are now allowed to serve at the altar, a function which has until recently been the prerogative of boys. This is a positive response to the elimination of discrimination against women by the Catholic Church, and improving the image of women in the church.

### **Other Forms of Female Evangelisation**

Monitoring women's participation in religious associations in the Christian churches can evidence endemic evangelisation by women. Writing on women in Sierra Leone, Filomina Steady (1978:154) describes "the really pious woman" as one who not only knows the whole order of service and most hymns by heart, but one who also belongs to several religious associations. This description is aptly applicable to Ghana where women belong to various religious associations and where in the recent past even literate women could impeccably sing the Gregorian and other Latin chants by memory.

There are discernible religious groupings within the church (1) gender differentiated groups such as women's fellowship, men's fellowship, Christian Mother's association; (2) associations which are predominately male e.g. Knights of Marshall, Knights of St. John and other lodges; (3) associations which are predominantly female such as Christ's Little Band; Guild of Good Shepherd, the Choir and Singing Bands. The main objective of these groups, among others, is evangelisation through bible fellowship for which they meet regularly in groups to read and share the Bible (the Catholics to a lesser extent than the protestant) in their familiar Ghanaian languages in order to understand and interpret the Christian message more efficiently. The Bible study is often interspersed with spontaneous prayers and hymns to induce a familiar African mood for worship.

Another common feature of the women's religious groups is evangelisation through the performance of charitable works. For example visiting the sick in the hospitals, visiting children's homes and caring for the poor and destitute in varied ways. The women pray, sing and minister to these as well as provide them with basic food items and clothing. In early 1992 the

Presbyterian Women's fellowship of Madina, near Accra, embarked on the task of assisting to cook for pastors and students of the Trinity College at Legon.<sup>8</sup> These support activities correspond to the teachings and practice of Christ, who did not only preach and heal but was also concerned with the feeding and the welfare of human beings.

According to Steady (1978:155-158) the women's groups serve as avenues for the development of religious leadership among women, who hold no formal position in the clerical hierarchy. They offer women opportunities to enjoy devotional fellowship with others who share similar problems and provide counseling on spiritual guidance for family life. The religious groups within the church provide social cohesion among members from varied ethnic groups, and emphasise the promotion of Christian ideals rather than ethnic. While agreeing with Steady that the performance of these activities strengthen and unite the women, the unquestioning and sometimes absolute "submission" of the women to the church needs to be addressed. Helping society through church activities is a form of evangelisation that is extremely laudable, but it appears that some women belong to several groups within the church and their active and regular participation in church-going and allied activities have given cause for suspicion and unpleasant allegations. There are allegations that women generally participate in church activities as an escape from family problems/obligations, particularly unhappy marriages. In other words women exploit religion for their own selfish agenda. Indeed, from an African functionalist perspective, religion must be practicable in the sense that it should be able to solve existential problems and fulfill human needs, and there seems to be over-reliance on religion by Christian women in pursuance of salvations to worldly problems. This behaviour then not only contradicts mission Christianity's eschatological idea, namely, a promise of a future reward for suffering on earth, an other-worldly rapture; it also means evangelisation has not sat well with them, and there is therefore an urgent need to give it a cultural relevance.

Also, it is claimed that some women use the attendance of church services (especially in the evenings) as cover up for rather secular practices, namely for extra-marital affairs.<sup>9</sup> Some of the results are broken homes, child

delinquency, divorce etc. Out of the 30 people I interviewed in the various religious groups, particularly protestants 17 women indicated that they become involved in church work as a relief from marital and domestic problems. Thirteen husbands were suspicious of their wives using the church to indulge in certain immoral practices such as adultery. Indeed three of the thirty men interviewed had lost their wives in this way. Local daily newspapers are also replete with such news.<sup>10</sup> In sum women's participation then means too much time is spent on church activities while very little time is spent with the family. This further indicates that the length of time used not only represents loss of productive hours, but has adversely impacted their families. The question is should evangelisation and charitable works then be done at the expense of a person's family? This is a serious issue that must be addressed through further research, but meanwhile it would be recommendable that women apportion their time profitably to both the home and the church.

### **Religion and Immorality**

The above allegations bring us to the question of immorality, which is frequently being publicized, both by the electronic and print media in Ghana and blamed on Westernisation and Christianisation. It is claimed that Ghanaian society is becoming increasingly morally decadent. It is a society where sexual laxity, pornography, drug abuse and the uncritical adoption of indecent foreign cultures are displacing traditional African values. These are accessed through high technology such as television, videos, and the Internet where women are debased. A recent report of naked Ghanaian women on the internet (May 1998) is one example. In 1992, a Catholic bishop criticised the "struggle and bickering among the various women's organisations, the constant family problems of one woman stealing the husband of another and family quarrels".<sup>11</sup>

Critiques on Christian women have also come from women in religion. During Ghana's transition from military dictatorship to democratic rule in 1992, women in Ghana were specifically advised to help attain a peaceful change and a sustainable democracy. Prophetess Asibu of the Ebenezer Calvary Church, Winneba, as a proclaimer of the message of Christ advised

wives of future political leaders to play the role of counselors in the political pursuits of their male relatives (*People's Daily Graphic* June 10, 1992:3). They were to assist their husbands and brothers in positions of authority in a positive and dignified manner rather than corrupting them by making extravagant demands on them, as has been the practice. The question is why are women specifically being used as vehicles for this message?

It has been observed that many Ghanaian women have through excessive, ostentatious requests, caused their men to misappropriate or steal state funds, open trading ventures, erect personal buildings for them for which the men invariably pay heavily, sometimes with their lives, when their tenure of office is forcibly interrupted by military coups.<sup>12</sup> Historical examples are demonstrated by the AFRC (Armed Forces Revolutionary Council) coup of 1979 and the 31st December 1981 revolution. In these military insurrections women were also not spared. Their very womanhood was demeaned when they were publicly bared naked, caned and paraded through the streets for alleged corruption, frauds, general moral laxity etc. Secondly, a rejoinder to the prophetess' described women as collabourators in the "moral insensibility displayed by men in high office" during the rule of General Acheampong. The author shows the importance of this message for women by stressing that in the event of political chaos, a coup d'etat, wives and children of politicians are usually the ones who endure most of the pains and suffering. The men invariably manage to flee, leaving their wives and children behind (*People's Daily Graphic*, July 2, 1992:5). Another perspective is that, "Christian women, as agents of change, have a moral responsibility to ensure that the progress of the nation remains on course" (*Daily Graphic*, December 23, 1995:3). The prophetess therefore, as a woman, felt obliged to counsel her female counterparts not to lead the men into temptation, but rather administer positive advice to their male relations. Again, the question is why are the men who make up the political contingent and are also the main perpetrators of the corruption in question not addressed directly? First, there still is respectability for womanhood and a recognition of women as peacemakers, but above all it shows that men actually listen to women and there is a greater chance that the message will get to them through women, that is,



wives, mothers, sisters. Also "Women invariably influence the thinking and behaviour of men in varying degrees and by extension the man's contribution to his family, community and society at large" (*Times*, December 23, 1995:3). Prophetess Asibu's exhortation, therefore, was an effort at making evangelisation applicable in the context of recent Ghanaian historical events.

## **The Way Out**

If evangelisation is an inner transformation that has outward manifestation, it must reflect in the life style of Christians. The message of Christ can be proclaimed in our actions at home, in church as well as at the work place. It is very crucial that evangelisation be extended to the work places to influence people's attitude towards work, and here female workers who prefer reading the Bible or singing hymns loudly during office hours but frown the moment work is assigned are being specifically addressed. They should be faithful in work because such irresponsible attitude to work is incompatible with, and represents a misunderstanding of, Christianity, making it less attractive for the non-Christian and aspirants.

Again, evangelical works are measured not only in terms of affiliation to several religious societies but by the expression of the change that has been effected in the individual through the gospel. Women's religious associations undoubtedly portray the basic pre-requisite to evangelisation, which is love, and service to others. However, adherence to formalized charitable deeds is an alternative rather than the exclusive method of evangelisation. There is the need, therefore, to cut down on religious associations if such involvement inadvertently impedes the raising up of a responsible Christian family, that is indeed a fundamental objective in the evangelising mission. On the other hand women should manage their time properly, apportioning their time judiciously to both the home and church.

Ultimately, if evangelisation should succeed women should be accorded more freedom and flexibility and full participation in the processes of evangelisation in all its nuances. As has been observed some mission protestant churches through the influence of African culture and spiritual

churches to some extent have admitted women into the priesthood. However, there is the need to go beyond the priesthood and give deserving female pastors the opportunity to rise to higher positions such as Moderator, President of the Conference etc. Within Roman Catholicism, though the question of female priesthood may at the moment seem remote, the idea should not be rejected outright. Since religion, like culture, is dynamic it is hoped that the Catholic Church, with time, would equally see some transformation with regard to female priesthood as it has done in other areas. Indeed, it has been jokingly asserted that one day the Catholic Church would encounter not even female priests and bishops but a "Black pregnant Pope,"<sup>1</sup> and jokes, like rumours, always invariably contain a 'mustard seed-like' truth.

Finally, as true Christians with the responsibility of the great commission women must uphold their moral dignity and integrity in order to merit a more prominent role in the evangelisation process. In Ghanaian traditional society it was imperative to preserve chastity before and after puberty. Indulgence in pre-marital sex was severely punished. While married, women including those in polygynous relationships, were obliged to remain faithful and chaste. The Christian churches preach similar virtues but these principles unfortunately seem to be giving way to overt immoral practices, even within the church where some of the clergy are not excluded. Christian women are required to demonstrate love and a high sense of moral dignity also to their highly placed husbands, brothers, fathers and others. Through positive suggestions and support they can guide the men to use their office to diligently give credit to whatever responsibilities they have been charged with. Mindful of St. Paul's exhortation Christians should endeavour to, "fill our minds with things that are good and that deserve praise, things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely and honourable."<sup>13</sup> In the same vein, men and husbands should fulfil their part of the bargain by endowing their families, especially their wives, with attention, encouragement, and love; thereby helping to create the peaceful atmosphere required to make the home a place worth living rather than leaving. In this way a Christian household is assured where both parents devote some time to the material as well as the spiritual needs of the family, guiding members to lead a life worthy to be called Christian. This is the first and most crucial step to evangelisation in our contemporary society.

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## Notes

1. This paper is a revision of an earlier one presented to the Women's Committee of the Christian Council of Ghana, February 1992.
2. See The Revised Standard Version Bible. The Bible Societies
3. See John 20: 11-18. In one of the Gospels there were other women with Mary Magdalene (Cf. Mark 16; Luke 24).
4. There are Biblical references, which give the idea that the apostles did not have much confidence or belief in Jesus when he was with them. See for example Mark 8: 31-33; Mark 9:19; Luke 24:18-25.
5. Long standing dissensions in this church culminated in its splits into two groups in June 1991, namely, The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana, and The Evangelical Church, Ghana; a major visible difference being this very small but extremely significant sign (,).
6. The newer versions of Spiritual Churches, the Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches do not accord women the prominent position that their counterparts in the old Spiritual Churches enjoy. There are very few women pastors in the newer religious movements such as Rev. Christie Doe Tetteh of the Solid Rock Ministries, Rev. Mary Owusu of the Great I am that I am, and Rev. Obuobisa, formerly of the Christian Action Faith Ministries
7. Although Sister Dora Ofori-Owusu was the first Ghanaian woman to be commissioned in 1976, she was sent to the USA as a fraternal worker until the 48<sup>th</sup> Synod of 1977 agreed to ordain women (see Gyimah 1987: 4-5).
8. GBC Television Programme, March 26, 1992.
9. A few months ago a young man narrated how his wife had fallen victim to an extra-marital relationship under the guise of evening church services.
10. See The Mirror, September 18, 1999: 11; The Mirror, July 4, 1999:2; Choice

FM Radio, Odo ne Asomdwe Programme September 22, 1999, to cite a few.

11. See The Standard, A National Catholic Weekly, No. 4, March 15-21, 1992: 7.
12. Quoted by Bishop Naameh, catholic Bishop of Damongo, Ghana at the Tenth Anniversary Celebrations of St. Paul's Seminary, Sowotoum, near Accra, Ghana, May 22, 1998.
13. Philippians 4:8.